



Riders of the Skies!

No, these men are not hurlers of death-dealing bombs. They are just cinematographers as they appear in action while "shooting" motion picture aerial thrillers. Lower right (full length) is Harry Perry, A. S. C., about to start for the heavens while making "Hell's Angels."

The other two pictures above are of Elmer Dyer, A. S. C., in aerial action and in repose. Inset shows Harry Perry and one of his aerial crews shot while "Hell's Angels" was being made. Standing, left to right: Billy Tuers, Elmer Dyer, Harry Perry and the late E. Burton Steene.

ALL IN THE DAY'S WORK

Whenever A Thrilling Air Scene Flashes Across the Screen—Remember, A Cameraman Was Up There, Too—Always Right "On the Tail" of the Actor's Plane. But, They Are Modest Men

By LORETTA K. DEAN

[This is the first of a series of articles about A. S. C. members who have been meeting romance, excitement and adventure in all climes while going about their daily task of photographing the stars. How Dan Clark, A. S. C., shot an under-water picture in a home-made diving bell will be a high spot in next month's article.—Editor's Note.]

NO MATTER what happens keep on the tail of that plane all the time. If it crashes I want the crash. Stay with it all the way." The speaker was a motion picture producer talking to his cameraman who was about to take the air. He meant business. The cameraman didn't even smile. Just nodded his head and climbed aboard the camera plane.

A half hour later the plane he had been told to follow had crashed to the ground. Only a burning mass of wreckage was left from which was fished the dead remains of a man who had been keeping smoke pouring from the plane. The pilot had jumped. But the smoke maker had stayed to the end—either because he did not hear the warning of the pilot, or for some reason that will never be known.

And—as the plane dropped like a plummet from the sky it was followed by a cameraman, a member of the A. S. C., who "got" every foot of it from the start to the unforeseen and tragic end. That cameraman was E. Burton Steene, who died less than a week later. Died from heart trouble. Whether or not his heart had been affected by the many, many wild flights he had made in his years of photographing in the air is something no one will ever know. But, the fact remains, he "got" his picture. Always got them. Always followed through. That is a way cameramen have.

We often read the startling stories of the feats of the actors and their "stunt doubles" in the air. We thrill at the narrow escapes they have experienced. We drop into our favorite theatre and sit with mouth agape watching the latest air picture and our blood runs cold as we see the star go through the death-defying stunts.

But—how many of us ever stop to realize that a cameraman was "on the tail" of each spectacular stunt we see on the screen. Riding like a mad man standing up in the plane with his body often twisted in weird shapes as he swings his Akeley about to keep the plane of the actor in his line of vision!

And always with the command of the director and producer ringing in his ears: "Follow that ship no matter what happens—we want it!"

Modest men are these cameramen of the air. Ask them about the thrills and they start telling you about the difficulties of getting the right filters for aerial work where their altitude is changed so swiftly that they run into different light conditions in the twinkling of an eye.

Take Elmer Dyer, for instance. I tried to get him to tell me about his thrills. Elmer is one of the outstanding photographers of the air.

"Well," said Elmer, "sometimes

it's tough up there. You see we get all set for the light conditions at five thousand feet. Then a bird gets his ship all twisted up and starts for the ground hell bent and we have to follow him, wondering if he is in a stunt or a real fall that will be a smash. First thing you know the darned light has changed so much that you don't know whether you will get a good picture or not. And on the ground the producer is yelling for perfect shots. . . ."

"Yes," I broke in, "But what about the thrills?"

"Oh yes," resumed Dyer, "that's so. Well, I have worked out a filter idea that makes me happy, for I know I'll get good pictures as long as I can keep a bead on the ship I'm after. I wouldn't tell you the secret of those filters for anything. But we can go through all kinds of air and light conditions and still have pictures that are what the producers want."

Try and get him to talk on the thrills and hazards!

"Oh, yes," suddenly exclaimed Dyer, "I remember one."

Imagine a man forgetting an airplane thrill!

"It was away back in 1925. I was flying in a plane with Dick Grace as pilot. Things were going great and I was tickled pink with the results we were getting. Dick and I had talked it over on the ground and we had planned our work all out. Everything was going great. We had signals all arranged and we were working together like a charm.

"Then came a shot that was to be a whiz bang! Grace was to suddenly go into a falling leaf so we could get a particular effect. I had one camera strapped to each side of the cockpit and when we were to go into the leaf he was to signal me and I was to fasten my belt on and hop to the other camera and signal him back.

"He signalled all right. I guess I must have gotten my signals all balled up for I gave him the wrong one and he went into that leaf while I was crossing to the other camera without my belt on me. The ship lurched and I started head-first out of the plane. I thought for a second I was surely gone. But I grabbed onto that camera and hung on for dear life.

"The ship gave another lurch and what he went into then I never did know, for I lost my grip on the camera and dropped down into the cockpit so hard I was partly stunned. Well, it's all in the game, but I didn't enjoy that little episode at all." And Dyer leaned back and laughed heartily as he thought of how narrowly he had escaped death while doing the everyday duties of a cameraman in the air.

Funny fellows these cameramen. Absolutely fearless. And then, some producers kick like steers when the cameraman demands ex-



Alvin Knechtel, at camera, and Col. Arthur Goebel, famous trans-Pacific and trans-continental flyer, about to go aloft to "shoot" a picture.

tra pay for going into the air. Who wouldn't ask it, Mr. Officer?

Dyer has been a flying cameraman since 1918 when he flew with the great Locklear. Steene flew with Locklear also. And Dyer has never been hurt yet. But he has photographed the aerial scenes of "The Winged Horseman," "The Great Air Robbery," "The Big Hop," "The Air Circus," and did a lot of work on "Hell's Angels," as well as the air work on "Flight."

All that happened to him in "The Winged Horseman" was that his face and hands were frozen while in the air on one sequence. But, like all cameramen, he makes light of that.

"I guess this air stuff is a bit dangerous," finally agreed Dyer, "and probably if the producers had to do the flying they wouldn't kick about paying extra for our work."

"Only once did I ever have the big boss with me," continued Dyer, "and that was a funny one. I was going to shoot some stuff over the site of the coming Boulder Dam for a man who wanted the shots for commercial purposes. We took off from Needles and flew about our business. It was a nice day and we did a lot of work. But we got a late start in the afternoon.

"Darkness suddenly started falling fast and we turned and headed for home. But you know how darkness falls when it starts. Well, we did some plain and fancy flying in the dark and finally sighted Needles in the distance. I admit I was a bit nervous, for I wondered how the pilot was going to land. The big boss was along and he was wriggling all over the place. But he kept quiet.

"Finally the pilot circled Needles several times and then started down. For the life of me I couldn't tell where he was heading, for there were no floodlights and fine landing fields in those days. But, I thought, 'Here goes nothing' as we started for the ground. I looked over the edge of the plane and could see nothing but what looked like a lot of white spots toward which we were landing.

"A few moments later we landed, beautifully. And then I found out what the white spots were. They were tombstones. You see, the pilot had recalled that there was a nice flat field by the side of a cemetery at Needles. He spotted the white tombstones and, guided by them, hit the right field and we all breathed safely again. I wonder what would have happened if he had misjudged, or if some of the tombstones had been of that dark slate."

Harry Perry is another air expert. For nearly two years he has been chief cinematographer, directing the photographic end of Howard Hughes' great air spectacle, "Hell's Angels." During that time he has had as many as twenty-three camera mounts for air work. But to talk with him you would think he was just an on-looker. Quiet, reserved, shy, this man has been in charge of some of the most spectacular air photography ever made.

"Steene and Dyer and Teurs and the other boys are the ones who have done the real work," explained Perry. He failed to state that there was scarcely a day that he was not in the air himself riding the tail of some ship in a thrilling air battle.

"These boys who specialize in air photography deserve a lot of credit," declared

Perry. "I mean the ones like Dyer and Teurs and like Steene was before he passed on. They have ridden in some peculiar old crates in past years, and I never heard any of them make a kick about the danger." But he did not say a word about the chances he has taken himself. Didn't say a word about the days during the shooting of "Hell's angels" when more than a score of ships were in the air engaged in mock aerial combat as dangerous as any of war days when, darting in and about this maze of planes, were a dozen or more ships in which rode cameramen "on the tails" of every ship in the mock fray. It requires iron nerve to dash about among a flock of ships with an accident impending at any moment.

Perry didn't tell us that he put in more than 150 hours in the air himself on this picture. He didn't tell us that he went up first each morning to see what flying and photographic conditions were like.

And Perry did the same thing in "Wings," which was photographed under his cinematographic direction. He did finally tell us about being fastened in the rigging of a captive balloon, high in the air, so he could make close-ups of the actors in the basket.

Then, there is Alvin Knechtel. "Al," as he is better known in picture circles, flies his own ship. Of course he cannot fly and shoot at the same time. But he dashes back and forth through the skies every chance he gets and has figured out many a knotty aerial problem while so doing. And when he has to shoot in the air he is perfectly at home. It was Knechtel who gave us the marvelous air photography in "Lilac Time." But "Al," like the others, doesn't like to talk about his air feats.

Al didn't reveal the fact that when he was "shooting" the picture "Lilac Time" he had a dual control plane and always flew it himself until he had it in position for his shot, when he would signal for his pilot to take it while he got a "shot" few men could get unless they flew their own.

If his pilot got out of position Al would calmly grab the stick, swing the ship back where he could get the best results and start shooting again. But, you never hear him talking about his work. He loves flying and will talk about that.

Billy Teurs is another A. S. C. member who helps put the air thrills on the screen. He and his Akeley and a plane are rarely seen apart.

Not only do the air specialists take to the clouds, but the other boys repeatedly are called on for aerial work. And, anyone who has ever flown knows that to hop into a plane when you are not accustomed to it and forget all about the attendant danger while you think of pictorial art, calls for nerve. But they are doing it all the time.

Clyde De Vinna was shooting on a picture in which a captive balloon figured. He had to make certain shots from the basket on the balloon. They didn't turn out so well. The next day found De Vinna hanging thirty feet beneath the basket. He had fixed up some ropes and a board. On the board was Clyde with his camera cranking away for all he was worth while the tiny platform swayed as the balloon yawed. At Mitchell Field, Arthur Edison some

Continued on Page 34



The late E. Burton Steene, as he used to appear ready for the daily jaunt into the air.

HARRY PERRY

Chief Cinematographer on the Two Greatest Aerial Spectacles Ever Filmed

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Amateur Movie Making

Continued from Page 27

can hardly be expected to use a definite script, but they can and should know fairly accurately just what is to be done and how to do it. While a written outline is invaluable, it is not always practical; but a clear mental picture of what is to be photographed is almost always possible, and the ability to visualize beforehand should be cultivated. It is an essential to successful cinematographic work of any kind. It expedites the actual shooting, and saves film in the really practical way. It makes the work easier, quicker, and more beneficial. And no really great cinematographer or director has ever been without this power of visualization; it is the prime foundation of success in screen art. Therefore, it is the one thing above all others that the amateur should seek, master, and cultivate if he would realize his aspirations toward true cinematographic artistry.

Italy

It is announced that the Cines Studios in Rome, which are the largest in Italy, will be turned into sound studios.

England

Supreme Film Ltd., announces through the British Press, the production of feature pictures by an entirely new sound film process, which is known as the "Aperiodic Non Microphonic" process. The films will be available for any sound film reproducing apparatus.

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All In the Day's Work

Continued from Page 4

years ago had his camera in a plane to shoot closeups of Jack Mulhall and Dorothy Mackaill. The plane was too heavily loaded for flying. The outfit was warned, but they did want that scene. So the plane started down the runway. Suddenly it took off a few feet and then shot back for the ground. By a miracle the ship landed without mishap. But there was a terrific jolt. And there was Arthur hanging on to his camera, hoping it would not be broken.

Yes, the stunt men and actors do some brave things in the air for the sake of thrilling the public. But they are highly paid and get much publicity out of it. But the unsung heroes, the cinematographers, are always "on the tail" of their ships—only you rarely hear about it.

"Hell's Angels" to Open in October

Caddo Productions' great air picture, "Hell's Angels," is at last tentatively scheduled to open in New York in October. Present plans call for the premiere of this picture at the George M. Cohan theatre where it is planned to stage an extended run.

More than two years' work have been put in on this production which the youthful producer, Howard Hughes, hopes will be the greatest air picture ever made. Reputed cost is more than \$3,000,000. Sound, dialogues and color effects have been incorporated in the picture.

Harry Perry, A. S. C., has had complete charge of the photography of this picture. Under his cinematographic direction scores of cameramen have worked for months, much of the time in the air, and Mr. Perry is highly enthusiastic over the air photography.

The Lyric Film Exchange, which operates the new Lyric Theater in Manila, announces that it will install a talking moving picture outfit in its theater sometime before July.